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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between students' participation in the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA) and their mastery of personal development skills. A secondary purpose was to collect baseline data for VICA in West Virginia. A three-part questionnaire was administered to all 156 VICA members who attended the Annual West Virginia VICA State Conference in March 1995. The questionnaire was structured to collect biographical information about respondents, assess their personal development skills, and determine their level of VICA participation. The results were subjected to statistical analysis. Ninety-six percent of the respondents were white, 71% were female, 33% had been VICA members for 2 or more years, and 66% were enrolled in the secondary VICA program. A low positive relationship was discovered between level of VICA participation and perceived development of cooperation ($r = .28$), and a negligible positive relationship was found between level of VICA participation and perceived development of self-confidence ($r=.13$). It was recommended that West Virginia's State Department of Education take the following actions: increase VICA participation rates among minority students; provide more training to enhance VICA members' leadership skills; and give students opportunities to serve in leadership positions in nonvocational organizations. (Contains 19 references.) (MN)

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Assessment of Personal Development Skills and Participation of VICA Members in West Virginia

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Assessment of Personal Development Skills and Participation of VICA Members in West Virginia

Given the volatile nature of the U.S. economy (Higgs, 1992; Karp, 1992; Jacoby, 1991; Whalen, 1991), a need is evident for leaders who can adapt to change in times of normalcy or times of rapid change. One way that leadership can be developed is through vocational student organizations (VSO) such as the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA). VICA is the only VSO that cuts across vocational program areas. It serves students preparing for careers in trade, industrial, technical, and health occupations.

Moss and Liang (1990) of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) defined leadership by synthesizing tasks of a leader in four categories from several sources. First, to envision and instill goals and set high ethical standards that reaffirm shared basic values that maintain the organization's viability in a changing context. Second, to achieve workable unity among personnel and motivate them toward achievement of organizational goals. Third, to plan and manage change efficiently and nurture the strengths of followers to facilitate goal directed efforts. Fourth, to serve as a symbol of the group and influence constituents beyond the group to achieve mutually workable arrangements.

Results of a study by Mativo (1993) indicate: (1) members perceived that participating in VICA contributed to the development of leadership attributes; (2) the degree of

involvement in VICA did not appear to affect members' perception of the organizations' contribution towards the development of leadership attributes; (3) there were no significant relationship among gender, age, or place of residence and the perceived contribution of VICA towards the development of personal leadership attributes.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories that may prove useful in understanding and analyzing VICA are personal-situational theory and interaction and social learning theory. Both theories involve a behavior element in an individual (Bass, 1960), and reinforcement element (Sheridan, Kerr & Abelson, 1981).

The personal-situational theory is based on an argument that theories of leaders cannot be constructed for behavior in a vacuum. They must contain elements about the person as well as elements about the situation (Bass, 1990). A person, regardless of background or origin, can learn to become a leader through different exposures and participation in leadership activities (Gordon, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 1990). The VICA Leadership Handbook (1989) stated that one major purpose of the organization is "to develop leadership abilities through participation in educational, vocational, civic recreational, and social activities." Therefore, the personal-situational theory is applicable to VICA because both the organization and the theory share the elements of personal and situational attributes.

The interaction and social learning theory explains the leader-follower relationship as a consequence of a leader's interaction with followers, as well as circumstances involved (Bass, 1990). Key elements of this theory are individual interaction and assumption of learning through social activities. The leader shows the follower the behaviors through which rewards may be obtained (House, 1971).

A review of the literature revealed that there is a paucity of studies that examined leadership development through secondary and post-secondary VICA. There is a need to determine the degree to which students involved in VICA believe that participation in the organization's activities fosters leadership development. Further, there is a need to determine the nature of leadership attributes VICA members perceive to be important for meeting their personal goals.

Objectives

The major purpose of this study was to determine if VICA members had developed personal development skills. A secondary purpose was to collect baseline data for Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA) in West Virginia. Specific objectives of the study were:

1. To determine the biographical characteristics of VICA members in this study.
2. To assess the extent to which VICA members perceive they have developed personal development skills.
3. To determine the relationship between the level of VICA participation and the perceived development of

personal development skills?

Limitations of the Study

Any conclusions drawn from this study are limited to the individuals attending the conference.

Methods and Procedures

Population and Sample

The population for the study consisted of all VICA members in West Virginia. However, for the purpose of this study, a non-probability sample was utilized. The sample consisted of all one hundred and fifty-six (N=156) VICA members who attended the Annual West Virginia VICA State Conference (March of 1995). Oliver (1981) pointed out that there are situations in vocational education research where it is difficult to select random samples. According to Oliver (1981) the researcher may face the necessity of using existing groups such as classes of students in a school or schools, participants at a conference or workshop, and teachers in a specialized option. Statistical inferences cannot, therefore, be made to the populations concerned.

Instrumentation

A three-part questionnaire was used to collect data from the subjects. The first part included questions related to biographical information. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of twenty-four (24) personal development skill statements (four measurement scales) adapted from the Personal

Development Inventory (PDI) developed at Iowa State University (Carter, 1989). Responses were coded using a seven point Likert-type scale with the following choices:

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Slightly Disagree
4 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree
5 = Slightly Agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

Part three of the questionnaire measured VICA club members' level of participation in VICA activities. This section consisted of thirteen (13) statements. A four point Likert-type scale was used to measure responses. The following values were used:

1 = Not Active
2 = Slightly Active
3 = Moderately Active
4 = Very Active

Content validity of the instrument was established by an advisory committee consisting of West Virginia State Department of Education personnel, and a regional teacher educator of West Virginia Institute of Technology.

Eight VICA members not in the sample were used to pilot test the instrument to determine its face validity and assess internal reliability. The four measurement scales (Leadership, Self confidence, Cooperation, Citizenship) yielded Cronbach's coefficient alphas ranging from .72 to .80 in this study as compared to .73 to .78 by Carter (1989).

Data Collection

Questionnaires were delivered to facilitators at the Annual

West Virginia VICA State Conference which was held at Cedar Lakes in Ripley, West Virginia (March of 1995). Directions for administering the instrument to VICA members were provided to the facilitators.

Analysis of Data

Data were analyzed using programs provided by the SPSS/PC+, Version 4.0 (Norusis/SPSS, Inc. 1990). Descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations, Pearson product moment correlations) were utilized in this study. The following standards as presented by Best (1981, p. 255) were used to interpret the correlations coefficients:

.00 to .20 negligible
.20 to .40 low
.40 to .60 moderate
.60 to .80 substantial
.80 to 1.00 high to very high

Findings

Biographical Data of Respondents

Over ninety percent (96%) of the respondents were white, and 71% were female. About one-third (33%) of the respondents had membership in VICA for two or more years. Two-thirds (66%) of the respondents were enrolled in the secondary VICA program.

Personal Skill Development

Table 1 shows descriptive data for each of the measurement scales. The personal development inventory scales which received

the highest mean scores included: citizenship (6.30), and cooperation (5.58). The leadership scale yielded the lowest mean score (4.21).

Insert Table 1 about here

VICA Participation and Personal Skill Development

The scores from part three of the instrument were summed to obtain a "VICA participation score." As shown in Table 2, a low, positive relationship existed between the level of VICA participation and the perceived development of cooperation (r = .28). A negligible and positive relationship existed between level of VICA participation and the perceived development of self confidence (r = .13).

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion and Conclusions

Minorities were underrepresented in this study. Biographical data in this study suggest the following: a "typical" VICA member is white, is a female, and has membership in the VICA secondary program for less than two years.

The leadership measurement scale was rated the lowest of the four scales by respondents. This suggests that VICA members

perceived themselves as having achieved less than optimum levels of leadership skills. Using the PDI instrument, Boyd, Herring, and Briers (1992) had a similar finding in which the leadership scale yielded the lowest mean score for 4-H club members.

VICA members perceived themselves as having a higher level of personal development skills for the following scales: citizenship, cooperation, and self confidence. These three scales may appear to be the cadre of the personal development skills which exists in vocational student organizations such as VICA.

The strongest relationships between participation and personal development skills existed for the scales on cooperation, leadership, and citizenship. Respondents' level of personal development skills increased as their participation in VICA activities increased.

The results show that VICA participation contributes to important personal development skill areas which coincide favorably with the foundation skills and workplace competencies presented in the recent Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report published by the U.S. Department of Labor(1991).

Recommendations

The State Department of Education and school districts should work together to address the following recommendations.

1. To increase minority participation rates among

students, more active recruitment of minority students within individual secondary and post-secondary schools should be conducted.

2. A greater effort should be made to provide more training to enhance leadership skills.
3. Students should have the opportunity to serve in leadership positions in non-vocational organizations. This will assist students in developing self confidence which may be beneficial for employment.

Further Research

4. Replication of this study in other states is encouraged.
5. Further research should be done to determine if the level of personal skill development among VICA members differ from that of non-VICA members. Utilization of a comparison group will provide a more bonafide study for drawing inferences.

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Table 1.

Means and Standard Deviations of the Perceived Level of Personal Development Skills of Respondents (N = 156)

Scale	M[a]	SD
Citizenship	6.30	.58
Cooperation	5.58	.43
Self confidence	5.27	.57
Leadership	4.21	.55

[a]Scale values: strongly disagree = 1; disagree = 2; slightly disagree = 3; neither agree nor disagree = 4; slightly agree = 5; agree = 6; and strongly agree = 7.

Table 2.

Relationship Between Level of VICA Participation and Personal Development Skills (N =156)

Scale	Relationship	r
Cooperation	Low	.28*
Leadership	Low	.26*
Citizenship	Low	.23*
Self confidence	Negligible	.13*

*p < .01.